Recording a parent's life story: a checklist and 10 first questions

One page to have on the table: what to check before you press record, and ten gentle questions for the first forty minutes.

The first conversation is a warm-up. Easy questions, forty minutes, then stop.

Before

- ☐ Check there is space on the phone
- ☐ Charge it, or plug it in
- ☐ Aeroplane mode on
- ☐ Ten-second test, then play it back

Setting up

- ☐ A small, soft room: carpet, curtains, a sofa
- ☐ Sit at an angle, not opposite
- ☐ Phone on a folded tea towel, about a foot away
- ☐ Television, radio and dishwasher off
- ☐ One person asking

During

- ☐ Ask permission on the recording
- ☐ One question at a time
- ☐ Count to three before you speak
- ☐ Do not correct anything
- ☐ Stop at forty minutes

The same day

- ☐ Move the file off the phone
- ☐ Rename it with the date and who is on it
- ☐ Keep a second copy somewhere else
- ☐ Write down what you did not ask

10 questions for the first conversation

No. 01 Let's start easy: what is your full name, and who chose it?

No. 02 Where were you born, and what have you been told about that day?

No. 03 What sort of child were you: quiet, cheeky, a worrier?

No. 04 What is the one story about you that the family always tells?

No. 05 When you were [say your age], where were you living and what was a normal week like?

No. 06 Apart from your parents, who looked out for you when you were young?

No. 07 What is a smell or a sound that takes you straight back?

No. 08 What can you do that hardly anyone knows how to do any more?

No. 09 Who would you like to hear this recording one day?

No. 10 Which part of your life would you like to talk about next time?

Rather someone else asked? Amanda records the conversations and writes them into a life story the family keeps. captureandkeep.co.uk/life-story/

Capture Cards, coming soon: a boxed set of 36 conversation cards for the family table, none of them on this sheet. captureandkeep.co.uk/capture-cards/

This sheet comes from captureandkeep.co.uk/guides/record-a-conversation-with-a-parent/, with more on how to ask.